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### Abstract

Love of knowledge is a hunger for life. Daily bread is no answer. -Ralph Downing, from The Early Essays

STEVEN HEIGHTON

## Downing's Fast

Love of knowledge is a hunger for life.  
Daily bread is no answer.

— Ralph Downing, from *The Early Essays*

## 1

Somewhere out beyond  
all ideas  
of right doing  
& wrong doing  
there is a field—

*I'll meet you there*

Years after first reading these lines of a long-dead Anatolian poet — reading them through tear-startled eyes — Ralph Downing started out toward the office for the last time. He was now what he had once referred to as *another fairly routine man, noosed in necktie and four-piece grey flannel strait-jacket, his schedule a five-day forty-hour malaise beginning each morning at nine sharp*. Though those mornings could hardly be called beginnings. They were points on the wheel. For years Ralph Downing's activities had clocked an almost unbroken circle, though he did enjoy a brief respite each Christmas (which he usually spent at home) and a month-long summer holiday (when he liked to vacation in the Thousand Islands).

His month-long summer holiday was due to increase by a week in another year, and by another week five years after that.

The office that wolfed down such a large proportion of the pie-graph of Downing's life was the Canadian administrative branch of a large international firm. This firm specialized in the manufacture of ovens, toasters, food processors, blenders, crockpots, garberators, battery-powered rolling-pins, dinner-roll warming-bins, microwaves and myriad other domestic indispensables, all ideal for the working woman. (Downing was responsible for promoting its newest devices throughout Canada.)

Although divorced, Downing was a decent family man; his ex-wife lived in a distant city with their daughters but he visited whenever he could, taking the girls for occasional weekends and nearly a week every Christmas. His alimony and child support payments were received punctually and often found to be more valuable than officially required – especially around birthdays and holidays. Although Downing had had a few insignificant flings since the divorce (and, to be honest, before it) his relationship with his ex-wife remained amicable, and over an after-office pint or two he could boast to colleagues (most of whom were also divorced) that Penelope was one of his ‘very closest friends’. The boys’d drink to that. But Downing would shake his balding head and slap assorted sharkskin shoulders with affable finality if another round were proposed, for since those first, subversive stabs of angina and his doctor’s warnings, he had become more moderate, cautious.

Not much of a story to begin with. Common enough though, even universal in some ways. Lay away the pin-striped suit (Downing’s suit was actually herringboned, cut tastefully in a subdued expensive grey), cancel the polished shoes and brand-new briefcase webbed delicately and smelling sumptuous as the interior of a new car – write these off and suppose a wide-brimmed straw hat, loose linen trousers or skirts and sunburnt shoulders and you find yourself among thousands of dark labourers, stooped in a flooded network of ricefields – cornfields, milletfields, canefields – you find red-jawed fishermen in ice-rimed slickers, forearms ridged and thick as anchor-rope heaving in nets full of slithering fish. Their hours vary (and their powers, man, their powers) but they work a set circumference of time, a set locus of soil or saltwater, and there is no escaping the gleaming nets and the steel-silver millions thriving onto the deck and dying, or the table in a hut by the paddies where a candle lights a simple meal of rice, some fish with spices, the bed where you’ll lapse exhausted for eight brief hours till hushed voices wake you to a simple meal of rice, some fish with spices, and the path *somewhere out beyond* back into a network of steaming paddies....

Always the need for a full plate, though it has never been enough. Always the need for a bamboo mat or a hammock and something to summon you out of it at dawn. In the mountains of Anatolia they tell the story of a farmer who one morning refused to get out of bed: the farmer, feeling he needed a break from the immemorial routine, announced that he was tired and could no longer work; he expected to be waited on till he was ready to return to the fields, and his family, fearing he was gravely ill, were methodically compliant. They brought him nourishing meals of goat and fresh river-trout and barley-bread, they offered up great tumblers of wine, lager and *raki*. And yet, oddly, he began to lose weight. The anxious wife insisted he eat an extra meal daily and the puzzled farmer, who actually felt fine and could not understand the weight loss, readily agreed. Soon he was eating more than his wife and husky sons together

and still he went on dwindling. He ate a whole roast spitted lamb crammed with garlic and peppered figs, yet almost overnight his arms grew thin and brittle as the walking stick he was now forced to use on the rare occasions when he did rise. He wolfed down numberless loaves of barley-bread and pillar-like stacks of pita: his ribs bulged out through his skin like steel hoops on a rotten cask. And his usually ascetic sexual appetites had grown abruptly omnivorous; his wife, toiling to satisfy his needs, began to look as dazed and gnawed-down as did he. Finally, in the midst of a vast casserole which the whole family had helped prepare and was now watching him dispatch, the sprig-thin farmer sagged back into his pillows, raised one thin arm, belched operatically, and expired.

Unhappily the Anatolian peasants who handed down this remarkable fable append no moral for our edification. Even Professor Sarah Dawkins, from whom Downing first heard it during his undergraduate years, refused to draw any drift-net conclusions. Modern medical science could no doubt offer a resonant term, a sturdy diagnosis of the farmer's disorder, but surely it is more tempting to see it as somehow metaphorical. Is the tale chiefly didactic, a piece of feudal propaganda designed to keep the peasants in the fields? Or perhaps the Sunday offering of a priest cautioning his horny flock against sensual excess? For a part of us is always asking would there ever be enough. The forty hour work week (or fifty, or sixty) effectively insulates the self from the senses – from the real life we're too ground down to lead. Or too afraid. Or, for a man like Ralph, too numbed:

Monday saves us. Tuesday is an excuse. Wednesday is the week's fulcrum, tottering with chores. Saturday and Sunday are carrots that reward us and carbo-load us for the coming week, and the morning after, another Monday, is unpleasant but at least not very real. And if one Monday you refused to get up and were promised all you could eat....

But Downing would not have done anything like that – at any rate not after his chaotic, often unhappy days as a student. And he never did get around to asking his doctor-friend Hans what kind of disease could have prompted such outlandish symptoms. Over their after-office pint Hans would have drawn on his pipe and speculated. He should certainly have come up with something.

## 2

## BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS' 'NEWFANGLED' QUICK-BREAD

- 3 cups white flour
- 1 cup 'one-minute' oats
- 1 tbsp. baking soda
- 1 cup 'fresh' milk (or use powdered milk) soured with vinegar (or use buttermilk)
- 2 eggs (or use instant egg powder)
- Half-cup white sugar (or use saccharine, aspartame, honey, or other substitute)

In a large bowl mix the flour, oats and sugar together, then add the soda. In another bowl combine the soured milk and egg. Mix all the ingredients and fold together till you have a thick paste. Briefly knead paste on a bread-board (or use DoughMaster EasyKnead Electric Kneader) and place in the microwave for 90 seconds. Eat immediately.

## 3

'But even the seasons are temporary: the cycles we consider most permanent are, like those we invent for ourselves, subject to change...' (At this point I looked up and saw that only Ralph Downing was listening to me, taking notes. *Somewhere*, I thought, *out beyond all ideas...*) 'During the last ice age, then, the summer our distant ancestors conceived, in their inarticulate way, as predestined and perennial finally failed one year to arrive. Ugh, they must have said, scratching themselves and shivering, It's too damned cold. As they fled south to Florida or died. And in three or four billion years (there is some disagreement in the scientific community about the date) the solar and terrestrial cycles we now consider eternal will break down forever, and everything will die.

'Now class, if we accept this unsettling forecast surely it grows harder to take comfort in the synthetic regularity of work, the cooked-up punctuation of mealtimes, the punctual flipping over of calendar leaves decorated with scenes of Lake Huron sunsets or the wavering amber grainfields of China; harder to find strength for the annual famines of Lent and Av and Ramadan and other religious ordeals; harder to place faith in the transient order and precision of language, which – take this down please – "in the hands of a master of exposition is an intricate, prodigiously specific instrument of communication, and in the mouth of a major poet a conduit to the unconscious & the seething, insurgent (sic) imagination".'

Downing's handwriting was abysmal and even now this editor finds it difficult to decipher and transcribe. (This editor has been reading

Downing's scattered, eccentric essays on and off for years. His death frees her to publish them.)

And this:

One Monday morning at 8:30 sharp, Ralph Downing started out toward the office for the last time. He walked, trying to remember to swing his arms (fitting exercise into his morning routine, in hopes that by feigning the climb-every-mountain keenness of students and cheerful, dynamic sit-com career-women he would shake awake the Rip Van Winkling youngster in himself). Instead he aroused the memory of a teacher he'd had back in college. Professor Sarah Dawkins had taught philosophy (as well as editing collections of essays) and hers was the only humanities course Downing had ever much attended. Dawkins had given the erratic Downing an A+ for his unorthodox work, and one time she said to him in her characteristically forthright way, 'Ralph, I like you. You have a clear and simple way of looking at the world. A world that smirks and snickers while you persist in smiling, laughing. Stay simple, Ralph. Stay out of fashion, stay in love. Keep writing. Some day write a book about your way of looking at the world.'

This was years ago, of course, and I can't be sure I've remembered the exact words. But that hardly matters. A good scholar seldom says exactly what is in her mind – her heart. And perhaps, after all, in the muffled world we've professed and tutored and booked into being, it is necessary to distance oneself from people and events in order to perceive them clearly. Downing would not have made a good scholar. I knew this to be true and yet I did hope he would write his book – though I realized elements of the academic community (what a risible contradiction in terms) would demolish it were it ever published. Because it would deal in unfashionable earnest with that silent, roaring edge where things come into being and die. Because it would tug fiercely at the tweedy legs of tranced theorists floating off into ethers of abstraction, and it would pull them back down to earth, *somewhere out beyond all ideas* – to sweet, spontaneous earth, that perfect edge. Because it would force them to stare down, like Gloucester, into the writhing belly of the world: and see. See or lose sight forever. For aye. *Four eyes!* Because it would have to be written in a new dialect. A kind of poetry, Ralph once said, a kind of concrete incantation, that's the only wake-up call the truth understands. Make it dance. Make it dance all night. And maybe the whole thing could never be written anyway but would have to be acted out.

In the flesh.

Professor Dawkins had a fleeting vision of a philosophical road-show that would star the young Downing and which she would M.C. *Step right up, folks. Step right up.*

Downing entered the park and began to cut across the grass as he always did when the ground was dry. There was a time when he would have felt the grass even through the soles of his shoes. Or so he'd once

written. Now smells from an invisibly-tended garden reminded him of the 'power-lunch' he was to have at one; a smattering of small round silver flowers vibrant in the breeze put him in mind of a current project involving ballbearings. That battery-powered rolling pin, or was it the DoughMaster Electric Kneader – real time savers both. Then it struck him that these small silver flowers, whose name he thought he knew but could not quite summon up, would not always have resembled ballbearings. Because he'd been thinking of Sarah Dawkins, he supposed. Sarah.

He left the grass for the sidewalk at the far side of the park and sped up. *There is a field.*

Dawkins. Dear Professor Dawkins. Shit, he couldn't write that. SARAH. In reply to your letter of the fifth I've got to admit that, in the commonly accepted sense of the phrase, I've 'sold out'. My uncle has arranged for me to have a job as {&c &c} and I won't be returning to school to work with you next year. Though you warned me about the 'lulling monotony' and (I think you put it) 'stultifying hardship, stultifying ease' of a regular job and income I'm afraid 'the academy' has come to terrify me even more (not you but the other things, the competitive, coercive things – I know you understand) and so my decision is made. I realize it's fashionable in academic circles (what a contradiction in terms!) to see the 'real world' as the Great Whore or slaving Philistine, but I feel confident that I can continue to live my philosophy in the gullet of the Beast – while raising real cash I can use to make a difference & do good. Maybe this is the best way to prove it can work. After all it's too easy to be a saint in seclusion, a sage in an ivory tower. The only way to prove it, this. Wish me luck.

I want to thank you for the interest you showed in me and those ideas as no other professor ever did and gave me low marks as I told you before. {I} will visit in future.

ps: it occurs to me this will seem a little cold.

Don't ever think I could forget everything. Love,

R.D.

4

*From The Early Essays:*

Fast food has become the most important form of 'nutrition' in our society. I guess there are plenty of reasons for it – what disease has a single cause? – but I feel it's mainly because people think artificial food is somehow safer. I sense people these days will do almost anything to avoid absorbing real things.



## 5

Caught by the omniscient narrator in an act of glaring hypocrisy, Downing is seen extracting an instant breakfast, then a loaf of quick-bread, from his microwave. The loaf is a failure. He forgets to eat the breakfast. So little time!

## 6

The traffic was always heavy at this hour. Downing was forced to wait a few seconds before crossing the busy street west of the park. On the far side he began striding through the buildings of his old campus but this morning, instead of staring at the pavement ten paces ahead, planning his day and the next day and evening and the next and the next, and planning, like so many of us, everything up to and including his funeral details – noosing up each and every loose end, worrying, scurrying, his brain a gerbil on the Wheel of Worry – he looked up and around at the looming old limestone towers. There was the humanities hall. Thick vines of ivy had completed their squid-like, rapacious embrace of the whale-grey east wall, so that now only the windows could be seen.

Fact: Downing had been an excellent promotions manager. Had been praised for his imagination and initiative. Had himself been promoted almost annually for the first six years of his employment after starting as a minor clerk.

Fact: Downing read widely (non-fiction) and borrowed smartly for his promotional campaigns. Though his most remarkable policy as an undergraduate had been to refine his reading to the raw essentials (Rumi, Shakespeare, Whitman, Dickinson, the various scriptures – most of which his peers had not read) and, instead, weather permitting, to stage genial debates with puzzled companions, to compose dialogues with dead saints, heretics, zealots, helots, poets, profs and prophets, philosophers and other fruitcakes, *all ye who pitch your mansion on the precipice* – and to scribble bad poetry and stumble, laden with wine (what else?), through the local woods. And to spend nights with Sarah Dawkins.

*There is a field.*

Fact: Downing's marriage to another woman, much younger than Sarah Dawkins, had spoiled after fourteen years because 'he had changed'. Conventional explanation. Upheld however by the court. Visiting rights to comprise three visits monthly, none to exceed thirty-six hours in duration.

Fact: When after almost twenty years he had paid his old professor a visit, she'd seemed not to recognize him. 'Poor old Sarah must be going senile.' Conventional explanation. In this case incorrect. Dr. Hans's considered diagnosis was Alzheimer's Disease, incipient but certain to progress rapidly. Yes, two more pints here please and a packet of chips.

'Poor Sarah, she must be losing it.' She really hadn't known who he was! At first. Well, old four-eyes Downing wore contacts now. Or was it his grey herringbone suit? At college he'd dressed like a cross between Whitman and a Whirling Dervish. But no. People expect your attire to change with age. You get accustomed to the necktie. Fifty years on the gallows of fashion. Perhaps Doc Dawkins was this very instant peering through the double-paned storm of her glass window on level five of the humanities hall, two dark probing eyes whorled below with indigo, her small head steadily shaking the way certain old folks' heads will do, as if the world has become a daily reminder of how much they've lost and they must constantly deny and gainsay everything they see. *No. No. I must be dreaming.*

No –

But if she were there she would see only Downing's grey herringboned back, borne away in the rushing stream of students roaring through the stone canyons of the co-ed residence *somewhere out beyond* the college art gallery and on towards the lake and their morning classes. It was 8:50. On the pavement by the gallery Downing felt himself glare at his watch (as many of the students were doing) and looking up was surprised to see Sarah Dawkins standing motionless ten feet away.

– Sarah, he said. He managed.

The old woman did not reply. He noticed her eyes were still very clear, acute.

– Sarah. Sarah, you must remember me.

The old woman did not, apparently, as she would not confirm this allegation in words. She did seem to be weeping though.

## 7

Divorce approved by the court, 16 August 1989.

'Because you have changed.'

But when?

Impossible to say. Looking back over a lifetime, class, consider the salient patterns the vital episodes and occasions and then admit not here nor here, norhere, norhere. Nowhere. We betray ourselves slowly, act by act, at an insidious, anaesthetizing pace. I can remember the feeling of loving my office, its snugness, the smell of the desk, the shelves full of familiar reading, and much later I remember hating it for its smothering air, the stacks of unanswered correspondence, the impudent lopsided leer of books I had not read and would never get around to. But when the last twinges of affection yielded to pangs of dislike I can not say.

Language, they say, is a labyrinth. A maze where the gerbil runs. Like the library of a great university there are a million aisles and stacks and cracks and niches where the past can be discreetly shelved, a thousand

limestone wings and abutments behind which pivotal incidents or the shadow of another self can hide. Are hidden; were hidden; have been would be will be hidden. I was never like that at all, I haven't changed. I haven't lost a thing, the leaves of grass are still there surging under my bare heels and there is time, still time: *I'll meet you there.*

Yes, you will need to know this. But not for the exam.

Love, take this down:

Grammar is the greatest disguise. Though we need it, though it has its own stiff beauty. Trust poets, but only when they're new at the trade or have grown seasoned and reborn.

*And yet*

## 8

Before you, Sarah, I did have one good teacher. Last year. He said one time that whenever good friends ate together it was in 'the church of the holy restaurant'.

Everyone thought that was a laugh.

I laughed too, but from the belly.

## 9

Downing fidgeted while Sarah burned, like Rome, with her tears. He stole a glance at his watch: 8:51. As a young man he'd been a promoter of tears – *they make each face a rivered country where nothing is frozen, everything flows* he'd written messily in one of his most successful 'essays'. (In the margin there had been a red checkmark and an avidly scrawled *yes: Sarah.*)

Who continued to weep, a sentimental old woman. But Sarah that was years ago. I'm sorry your husband was a sad, stymied man who belittled your life's work and was swallowed completely by his own – but that is not my fault. For that much, at least, I'm not to blame. I could hardly have stayed with you. Think of us together now! You're an old woman – old. Weeping among the undergraduates, shamelessly. I wish you would stop now, Sarah. Sarah? Please. Stop it. Please.

For Christ's sake Sarah get a HOLD.

It was 8:53. Downing had not been late for years. A brisk purposeful nod to an acquaintance or a subtle eyes-averted circumvention, nothing personal you understand, was the best insurance against being late. (*The tyranny of appointments keeps us from penetrating the skins of passersby.* Another red checkmark – two.)

Sarah Dawkins kept weeping. Because of his hypocrisy? Hardly. Time makes hypocrites of us all. And everyone knows the Wheel World can't won on sidewalk conversation and sentimental philosophy. Always the need for food, for sleep. A field. Rice paddies in the sun.

– I'm sorry, Sarah, I'll be late, he said, brushing past her. For a second it really seemed his hand might edge out and seize hers, but the fallow, papery folding of her skin seen at close quarters stopped him. For a moment he thought he caught the rich dense scent of her hair – the same, the same. But he had to hurry. He'd be late.

– You had something, she said softly. She diagnosed? Her keen eyes peered from deep sockets encircled by a network of wrinkles. They were a few inches from Downing's eyes. They seemed to have a life of their own, like two remote faces pressed against abbey casements, consumptive poets peering from garret windows in a romantic myth, impossible to live...

– I've got to go Sarah. I'm sorry.

And Downing did go then, though glancing back at the bent woman as he rushed off he was startled by tears, tears of his own, then a sudden numbness in the arms, a pain around the heart. *Angina* – it sounded like some far, exotic country, a land of high dusty plains ringed with monasteries and remote, snowy mountains, monks filing among ruins and barrows in the high shrill air.... Stress-related, the pain. The tears were too, a function of stress. Always they came unexpectedly, a sudden upwelling from some mysterious spring he'd thought long dry – that he'd bricked up gradually as he discovered how peaceful life could be without insoluble questions and frantic, fruitless mental endeavour. Each year another brick. An old story, without beginning or end. Who can say when the last trickle dried? Doc Dawkins, wiping tears from her eyes: *the unexamined life is not worth living*. That rusty old saw. Anyone could see it was a joke, the melodramatic motto of neuropaths and tenured snakeoilers hoping to inject more sanguine souls with the venom of their angst. And yet these tears. A sudden hunger. Regular meals had always been soothing. When one ended there was another on deck. It was 8:58. The pain stabbed once, twice, unbearably, and Downing felt a part of himself fall – but here, here was the office tower. Yet he found himself walking past it and ignoring the curious stare of the secretary he usually met each morning at the front door, but now brushed by on the sidewalk. At 9:03 he crossed Division St (though Division St should not be here) and turned onto Union (though Union, too...) and started downhill toward the lake. He'd never done this sort of thing before. He felt irresponsible, exhilarated, a nine-year old skipping Math, and his body felt younger now too, the angina relenting, the word itself now sounding earthy, warm, and carnal. He felt good. A generous wave suffused him and he hoped Sarah was all right too. He sensed however it was too late to turn back and find out.

9:06, he was really late now. The lakefront was deserted save for a few students scattered on the grass sunbathing. *When the day is sunny and hot a true philosopher walks outdoors. Remember the stoa. A philosopher is a 'lover of knowledge' and should let the sun have knowledge of him. Grace consists in the breaking of skin* –

Three checkmarks here, an almost illegible Yes.

By around 9:25 Downing had found a trail leading into pine woods along the water. This was just past the federal penitentiary that juts out into the lake. *Placing a prison on the waterfront, in sight of a beach where the affluent student body sunbathes, seems to me a gratuitous insult with endless sadistic implications. With unconscious sensitivity the architects left out windows.*

The forest was dark and cool, deserted. It was almost ten when Ralph found his trail crooking sharply to the left where it really ought not to go. Though he'd never actually been here he'd seen enough maps of the region to know the lakeshore didn't veer or end so soon, but there it was: the shore turned south and receded into a brilliant shimmering light that fused water and sky to a single mass. For as far as he could see, headlands of emerald and silver ranged out like reaching fingers. The coast had grown rocky. Leaving the shore his trail became thinner, a mere trampling of grass and weeds, an animal track. He found himself climbing from the shoreline into open country, a moor of dwarf pines and wavering yellow grass glistening like cornfields in a stiff wind. The sun was hot on the pines and on the yellow grass. He removed his suitcoat and remembered to rest it on an esker by the trail so he could pick it up when he returned. He walked on, his faint track moving briefly inland then curving back to trace the cliffs and capes over the sea, for looking east he saw the lake had fanned impossibly into a wide expanse of water churned by cool onshore winds and traversed an hour offshore by a whale who arched his slick black spine, filled the air with a creamy, sexual spume and vanished deftly. The going along these cliffs was rough for his shoes slipped and careened on the stones so he removed them and found it easier to go barefoot though the naked feet stung and bled a little pierced he supposed by the knifesharp gravel. Coming down the stones turned gradually to sand, as a young child he glided down dunes in sprays of white scudding into a small cove where the sea breathed and expired continuous over salt and pebbled flotsam, it was hot, the high sun split in generous shafts the green was bloodwarm with the light he stripped and started to wade and found a fluted seafloor wavering underfoot heard music as water seeped through his open pores and long bones up to his chest now swimming and found himself both under and above his head arcing up to the left he did a slow stroke now steady breathing as he crossed the lake once to Garden Island near the ferry like a dolphin vaulting so the passengers ran to the rail and pointed and waved as a young man in Sarah's class he performed his creed and when he did not come and swam instead she understood and met him one evening on wolfe island with food and wine making love in a field behind a disused church she taught him how as his face breached up through a haze of water he saw mountains reared and sleeving themselves in snow clear as a blank page as skin as water a spectral element sweeps through him in rippling waves with numbness and then in the forest with sarah he called how the snow drifted through

us it seemed your tears ran down through dying foliage melting now underneath him the sea's fingers reached in reeds from what depths what silence twining at his balls ah sarah his ankles and toes & grew briefly into his growing hair through years I have left you nearing an island where we'll meet the far east side of the brain *somewhere out beyond all right doing and wrong doing there is a feast and we're swallowed, swallowed still* swimming the seafloor rose up in sand to meet him he walked from the water or on it onto banks where a meal was laid there were sandbrown loaves steaming in light bottles of redwine jewelled in the glass chilled & beaded even then he could taste them like summer the sun was nearly gone behind the far capes & light was longing like the world over sand into crowded forest above where maybe

By the gallery a small crowd of students gathered and turned over the body of Ralph Downing. One of them backed off a few steps and threw up in a tulip bed. A jogger in black tights raced off to find help.

– But I'm afraid we're – I'm afraid it's too late, said another of the students: a thin blond man in a medical school jacket.

Professor Dawkins peered between shoulders. She seemed to be crying. What could have happened, she said.

– It looks, he diagnosed, like he's had a severe myocardial – a heart attack. Bad. A really bad one. I'm afraid I can't risk any kind of resuscitation, I might injure him more.

Professor Dawkins insisted he try anyway, but the student said softly that his hands were tied. He pleaded inexperience and muttered something about lawsuits. Dawkins knelt beside the body and continued to weep. Please, she said. Please.

– I'm afraid we'll have to wait for the ambulance, the student said, tendering his hand toward the old woman's trembling shoulder and stopping just short. Try not to worry. There's still time after the heart stops.

– Yes?

*a crowded forest above where maybe I find her & maybe*

*ten thousand fields of rice gleaming like fishscales in the sun*